

Critical Airspace Checkup

Flight Planning

- **Brush up on your knowledge** – Online courses are a quick and easy way to get back up to speed on critical airspace issues. Check out these free online courses: Know Before you Go (www.aopa.org/asf/online_courses/know_before), and Mission: Possible - Navigating Today's Special Airspace (www.aopa.org/asf/online_courses/mission_possible).
- **Use current charts** – When it comes to airspace, change is the only constant. It's essential to have up-to-date aeronautical charts for the area in which you'll be flying. Plan your route carefully, being certain to note any special-use airspace that may lie in your path.
- **Get a briefing** – There's no substitute for an official briefing from FSS or DUATs. Specifically request a standard briefing, to include information on any flight restrictions along your route, and update your briefing shortly before departure.
- **Note the notams** – Temporary flight restrictions (TFRs) are published as FDC notams. These are available from FSS and DUATs, as well as from several unofficial sources. Rules governing operations in other types of airspace (the Washington, D.C., ADIZ, for example) are also published as FDC notams. Read carefully! Because TFRs generally are not depicted on charts or included in GPS databases, this is the only way to be certain that you won't be violating any airspace.

Critical Airspace:

- **TFRs** – Temporary flight restrictions may be established for a number of different reasons—Presidential or Vice Presidential travel, firefighting and law enforcement activities, to name a few. The sizes and shapes of TFRs, and the operating limitations within them, can vary significantly. They can also appear with little or no advance warning, so check notams before you depart. Graphical TFRs are available on the FAA website at <http://tfr.faa.gov/>.
- **Restricted Areas** – These areas exist to keep aircraft away from hazardous military activities, and are outlined in blue on sectional charts. It's legal to fly through a restricted area when it's inactive, but you always should contact the controlling agency (listed on the sectional chart) to verify that the area is "cold" before entering it. Don't rely on the published hours of operation.
- **Prohibited Areas** – Typically established for reasons of national security, prohibited areas are outlined in blue on sectional charts. It is *never* legal to enter a prohibited area, so steer well clear.
- **Land-Based ADIZ** – The DC ADIZ is currently the only land-based ADIZ, although others may be established if required for national security. Generally speaking, VFR operations in the ADIZ require you to file a special ADIZ flight plan, establish and maintain two-way communications with ATC, and squawk a discrete transponder code. Remember that authorization to operate within the ADIZ *does not* constitute a clearance to enter the Class B and D airspace within it. For more information, print the Checklist for ADIZ Operations available at www.aopa.org/whatsnew/newsitems/2003/031403_check.pdf.
- **Flight Restricted Zone (FRZ)** – This area—a 15-nm-radius ring at the heart of the DC ADIZ—is a general aviation "no-fly zone." If you enter the FRZ, you will be intercepted (and potentially shot down) by military aircraft...so don't even think about it!

Enroute:

- **Maintain situational awareness** – Regardless of how you're navigating—pilotage, dead-reckoning, VOR, GPS, etc.—it's critical to maintain awareness of your surroundings. Keep charts handy, and actively verify that you *are* where you intended to be.
- **Don't rely on GPS** – A GPS receiver can be an invaluable tool when it comes to avoiding sensitive airspace areas, but be careful not to rely too heavily upon it. A GPS is only as good as its database: A two year-old database won't warn you about a two week-old restricted area. Also remember that ATC radar and GPS don't always agree—and that radar usually wins the argument. Give yourself some extra room when using a GPS to navigate around critical airspace.
- **You're the PIC** – Receiving flight following from ATC, or operating under IFR, does not relieve you of your responsibility for navigation. If ATC gives you a clearance that will take you through one of the areas listed above, query the controller.
- **On guard!** – When able, monitor the emergency frequency (121.5) while en route. If the worst happens, and you stray into sensitive airspace, ATC or intercepting aircraft will attempt to contact you on that frequency. Also be familiar with intercept procedures. You can download a free reference card here: <http://www.aopa.org/asf/publications/intercept.pdf>.